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DISHING IT OUT FROM THE HEART OF ENGLAND

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12 Points Festival

BY [TONY DUDLEY-EVANS](#) on 25 JULY 2016 · (0)

Victoria Eugenia Theatre, San Sebastian, Spain

20 to 23-07-2016

The 12 Points Festival is an annual festival run by the Improvised Music Company from Ireland dedicated to the presentation of young emerging bands from different European countries. Twelve bands with an average age of under 30 are chosen each year from twelve countries; this is done through an application process with final decisions being made by the current director Ken Killeen. The festival is thus a celebration of the general European scene and at the same time of particular distinctive scenes in Europe.

This year the festival took place in the beautiful Basque city of San Sebastian in the north west of Spain, as part of this year's programme celebrating San Sebastian's role as European Capital of Culture. Interestingly, the festival was integrated into the much



Insufficient Funs

larger Jazzaldia San Sebastian jazz festival, the first time that the festival has worked within another festival. This made for an interesting contrast between the big names, e.g. Snarky Puppy, Jack DeJohnette, Jan Garbarek, appearing around the beach area in the main festival and the young bands appearing in the stunning Victoria Eugenia Theatre, and also between the party atmosphere on the beach and the concentrated listening in the theatre.

There were also panel sessions as part of the 12 Points Festival curated by Prof. Tony Whyton of Birmingham City University with discussions of the role of jazz festivals within the general jazz scene, the role of technology in jazz performance and an introduction to the Spanish scene.

Clearly the major theme of the festival is the strength of the young European scene and how there is a definite European identity to these bands which transcends European borders and is significantly different from the identity of the American bands playing at the main festival. But other themes emerge from the programme, one being the emergence of a number of very interesting solo or duo acts, another being the interaction of contemporary jazz with different styles of rock music and electronica, and a third being the key role of the drummer in these groups.

The most impressive solo performance came from the Swiss drummer Julian Sartorius. His set was much more than just a drum solo, building up different sequences of rhythmic ideas that held the audience's attention throughout the 40-minute set and indeed generated the biggest standing ovation of the festival. Not far behind was Norwegian Hilde Marie Holsen's solo performance on trumpet and electronics that created a totally improvised set of beautiful soundscapes. I particularly liked her trumpet sounds but felt she dwelt a little too long on the manipulation of the electronic sounds. Marco Mezquida from Menorca Spain played a solo piano set that crossed many musical borders and impressed with the variety of his vision.

On the duo front the Irish duo of Insufficient Funs with Matthew Jacobson on drums and Sam Comerford on bass saxophone was for me the most impressive set of the festival with the bass sax developing percussive lines and honks that complemented the drumming very effectively. Embla, a voice drum duo from Denmark played a set that was enjoyable but which perhaps failed to sustain interest through its 50 minutes.

The rest of the sets were played by trios or quartets. The Eva Klesse Quartett from Leipzig Germany were impressive with Eva Klesse leading the group from the drums with forceful if occasionally rather staccato contributions. But this a nicely integrated group that clearly play together quite a lot and produce a good range of moods in their material. Strobes from the UK led by Dan Nicholls were equally impressive with the use of electronics and in the interplay between Dan on keys and Matt Calvert on guitar and laptop with the drumming of Josh Blackmore. Chromb from France was the group that made the greatest use of the energy of rock to produce a varied if occasionally rather overpowering set. Nordmann from Belgium have put out albums on both jazz and rock labels, and make effective use of a more experimental and integrated rock sound with the saxophone (Mattias de Craene) choosing to integrate with the rhythm players rather than play a more usual frontline jazz role. I enjoyed this group, but found I wanted de Craene to take off in a free jazz style.

Of the remaining groups Four Seasons from Austria, with a quartet with players from Brazil, Greece and Sweden as well as Austria, was the most straightforward of the 12 groups, but really impressed with the quality of the solos as well as their written material. The accordion trio led by Joao Barradas from Portugal was at its most impressive when Barradas was creating sounds not normally associated with the accordion. Finally Water Boogie System from Sweden played a relaxed and swinging set but perhaps failed to sustain interest over the full 50 minutes.

One other notable feature was the number of times bands build up to a climax with a sudden stop at the end of the piece. This clearly also happens elsewhere, but it was a marked feature of the

playing of these young bands. Is there a term for this, I wonder!

I would recommend this festival to anyone interested in exploring future directions in jazz. The next one in 2017 will be in Aarhus Denmark and in 2018 it will return to its home basis in Dublin.

- **For more details about the 12 Points Festival go [HERE](#).**

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